



113 Metlakatla St
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April 25, 2017

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai and FCC Commissioners:

Thank you for your support of the Rural Health Care Program. As you recognized in a recent Senate Commerce Committee FCC Oversight hearing, broadband telemedicine is a critical component of addressing the health care needs of Alaskans.

Telemedicine has allowed us to dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs and expand local treatment options. It has also helped reduce Medicaid costs.

Sitka Counseling has been able to reach the community of Yakutat with our 7 clinicians from Sitka, giving them more of an option in Behavioral Health care services. We have been able to access veterans through the tele behavioral health in Yakutat with our Sitka clinical staff.

However, the current \$400 million Rural Health Care Universal Service Support budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology, and increased demand for services. The Universal Service Administrative Co. also recently announced that it exceeded the funding cap for the current 2016 fiscal year ending June 30, 2017. Applicants that filed during the Sept. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016 filing window will receive a pro-rated percentage, 92.5 percent, of the qualifying funding requested. In our case, that means we will be responsible for paying an additional \$490,716.00 per year, which we did not budget or anticipate, in addition to the portion of the cost of services that we are already responsible for paying under the rules of the rural health care support mechanism.

If we were unable to get USAC funding we would not be able to provide services to the community of Yakutat, the clinic there would close and we would lose 1 or 2 clinicians here in Sitka, since their primary focus is the Yakutat community. The loss of services would be detrimental to the community of Yakutat. We have worked very hard for the last 8 years to build the relationship in the community of Yakutat.

We ask that you take steps to ensure both the near and long-term viability of the Rural Health Care Program to meet the increased demand for telemedicine services both in Alaska and across the country. We believe that the FCC should increase the budget for the rural health care support mechanisms to reflect inflation over the past two decades, as well as increased technology and telecommunications demands due to our HIPAA legal obligations, advances in



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telemedicine capabilities, changes in patient expectations and standards of care, and new demands from skilled nursing facilities.

In addition, please consider implementing an inflation adjustment mechanism for the future, and short-term measures to restore qualifying funding requests filed Sept. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016 to 100 percent.

Thank you for your support of this important program.

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CC:

The Honorable Senator Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Sullivan
The Honorable Congressman Young